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Students' Expectations from Graduate Studies in Heritage (Tourism) Management

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ABSTRACT

This article provides certain key aspects that might help to further develop academic heritage education. These have been discussed within brainstorming and round-table sessions carried out by World Heritage students at BTU Cottbus-Senftenberg. Important aspects regarding expectations, current issues and prospective career opportunities were selected after these sessions. With the idea of our International Master Programme in mind, the results of this work have been summarized to identify what makes a good focus to Heritage Studies and further strategies to improve this discipline. It was concluded that international and interdisciplinary approaches should serve as the basis to facilitate personal research interests, critical thinking, a sense of student community and how all these can be applied to a future professional career. External students, faculty members and heritage professionals are invited to join this debate.

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The methodology used for coming up with the conclusion for our presentation at the final HERCULES Project conference in Assisi and consequently this paper were a series of round tables and brainstorming sessions which made our results not scientifically-oriented but more based in opinion, which considering our topic is exactly what we set out to do. In our opinion, the emotional aspect is very important when looking at heritage and tourism issues.

When looking at the role of education in the field of heritage, first of all we must assume that we all share a cultural awareness. When coming from different backgrounds and meeting in the heritage field it is both surprising and encouraging that no matter what background one comes from, the first impression when meeting seventy fellow students from thirty different countries, everyone shares a common understanding about issues like culture, travel and issues that might be important for future generations. Acknowledging the legal tools at our disposal, like UNESCO's 1972 Convention and its Operational Guidelines is increasingly important to be able to develop a solid basis which would give the platform for our work in the future.

Management is another key aspect in the field of Heritage Studies. The fact is that the majority of students in this field are progressively focusing on management issues which gives them the possibility of a global perspective and a chance to development their entrepreneurship skills and create their own jobs. One of the recurrent questions among students is "What kind of job can I have in the future?", and one of the most frequent answers is that in the Heritage field one must look for or create his or her own job. As discouraging as this might sound, it opens a whole set of new possibilities and raise a new mentality among students.

As in any case dealing with education, critical thinking is an extremely important point. One has to be aware that when dealing with the heritage discourse, the UNESCO approach is the dominant approach; at the same time, this dominant approach can and should be the subject of critical analysis. A critical view towards heritage could open a set of completely new opportunities: what seems perfect on paper and in various charts and analysis gets seriously tested during fieldwork and when having tangible 'in the flesh' experiences. The outcomes and conclusions from the Summer Seminar which were very critical, confirm this.

The huge advantage of the multi-disciplinary approach in Heritage Studies has to be underlined. The inter-disciplinary perception broadens one's perspectives and it is a way to go deeper and strengthen the knowledge acquired previously, whatever that may be.

In the academic world, Heritage Studies are a new and unique programme; heritage in itself is not a new concept, however, World Heritage as a concept came in existence around forty years ago, while World Heritage Studies as a study discipline only before a decade and a half. Therefore, we are dealing with a very young set of studies and it still holds a very idealistic appeal for many students. Our experiences have shown that the motivation of many students enrolling in Heritage Studies programmes is often not

career-based; in fact, the main motivation is often their passion for doing something they love instead of looking for a degree that would increase their chances of employment in the future. From personal experience, the stories of many heritage students are alike in the fact that the choice of this educational field often comes after being disillusioned with a certain career path or a certain lifestyle which led them to reconsider their choice and follow their passion and take a different approach to life.

The opportunity to engage in research activities is also a big motivation for many individuals, and the number of students who after completing a Master Programme continue with a PhD and a career in research cannot be overlooked. Finally, the international setting that Heritage Studies programmes offer, the possibility of internships in the field which are the main part between the academic level and the professional world, the opportunity for establishing international connections and networking and above all the opportunity of following one's dream are all strong points of motivation for acquiring a Heritage Studies Master Degree.